The Hermit Thrush and Other Verses

MARION MURDOCH

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THE GIFT OF

CHARLES WILLIAM WENDTE

To Rev. & Mrs. C. W. Wendte—
With hearty good wishes from
Marion Murdock

THE HERMIT THRUSH
AND OTHER VERSES

By

Marion Murdoch

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To My Friends

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TO MY MOTHER

More than fourscore and ten your years attain,
Yet still life greets you—seer-like, patient, sane.
Calm, eager-souled, and still with stalwart will,
You watch the world its devious course fulfill.

You loved the arts of peace, the healing art,
In saving life you took a loving part.
To neighbors ill what kindly aid you lent,
Aye in your home what sacred service spent.

Your eager youths you helped to understand
The holy mission of their native land.
The mission to forge freedom here secure,
To build in wisdom what should long endure.

But now a wider vision comes to view,
A hope for freedom greater than we knew.
You live to see us warring to maintain
That priceless dower through a wide domain.

America at war that wars shall cease,
And nations dwell in liberty and peace.
May your triumphant years this blessing know,
This world enfranchisement, before you go.

June, 1917.

THE HERMIT THRUSH

In a garden here, as a dreamer may,
I sit and muse on the waning day,
And mingled sweet with the sunset flush,
I hear the song of the hermit thrush.

In this seraph mood does he sing to me?
Or his mate, enraptured on yonder tree?
Or does love of life into music rush
From the inmost heart of the hermit thrush?

Not now to reason of Nature's ways,
But in awe to whisper that joy is praise,
That this halcyon song in the evening hush
Is the prayer to heaven of the hermit thrush.

ACROSS SAN FRANCISCO BAY AT SUNSET

West on the island shore I stand
To watch the white sea wash the strand,
And fair before me stretch away
The long blue hills
Across the Bay.

I mark the hurrying crafts that go
With human freightage to and fro,
Where following close, in eager play,
The sea-gulls sail
Across the Bay.

In shimmering light they sail, for lo!
The splendor of the afterglow,
As pours this glory—ray on ray—
From hidden powers
Across the Bay.

Ah, best,—is all this beauty rife
A setting for heroic life;
A risen city stands to-day
Transfigured thus
Across the Bay!

THE PEACE WORKERS

What manner of men are they who dare to say
We shall not work for peace? The trial by war
We saw, and death and desolation came;
Brave millions, in young manhood beautiful,
Denied their birthright to live out their lives.
We knew the agony of homes bereft,
The reckless shattering of earth's lovely shrines;
The little children ill fed, fatherless,
The broken mothers, homeless, wandering.
This aftermath of peace through war we know,
And so say shame to those who still would plead
War's preparation for the goal of peace.

We ask that our defense be fellowship;
That high preparedness shall henceforth mean
Wise councils, kindness, courts of justice, law,
That to be saved, mankind shall summon swift
All spiritual forces, and the might of mind.

BY THE NIAGARA RIVER

Ah, who could dream the force concealed
  Where this calm water flows,
Or tell that toward a cataract
  The quiet river goes!

Who sees that this calm stream of *life*
  A surging flood may roll,
Or knows, till some fierce agony,
  The pent up power of soul!

A GROSBEAK

A grosbeak sat on a gray birch tree,
Lovely in garb as a bird could be;
Sable-throated, with trimmings white,
Beautiful rose-breast full in sight.

Men and women were passing by,
Nobody lifted an eager eye.
Came little people who loved to see,—
Nobody looked at the gray birch tree;

Nobody saw that winsome sight,
Rose-adorned singer in black and white.
Singer? ah, yes, for a woodland air,
Sweeter than nightingale's, sounded there.

The leaves of the birch tree caught the strain,
The breezes carried the rich refrain,—
Large and little folk passed along,
Nobody heard that heavenly song.

But what recked the bird in its high delight,
Of human hearing and human sight?
His lays for his love-mate all his care,
And I was nobody standing there.

WORLDLY

I love the world,
The radiant morning world,
When on the leaves, dew-pearled,
The sunlight plays;
The world when birds awake
And sing for life's sweet sake
Their matin lays.

I love the world,
The quiet evening world
When colors are unfurled
Athwart the sky;
The world of witching nights,
When heaven's illustrious lights
Are lit on high.

I love the world,
The struggling human world—
Though now through tumult whirled,
Have trust benign,
Have faith to reach the goal,
Have hope for every soul,
Through love divine.

BY THE STILL WATERS

In this deep valley of despond to-day,
Dear Life, I greet thee, but I do not pray,
I come with no petition but to stay
By the still waters.

My mood is failure in this ceaseless strife
To reach full measure of harmonious life;
My wish,—retreat from inner voices rife
To the still waters.

Bid conscience leave me, give the conflict o'er,
To-day let loud ideals call no more,
Let sacred stillness all my life restore.
By the still waters.

THE PEACE THAT PASSETH UNDERSTANDING

To M. W. G.

I am not wise, I cannot solve
This mystery of field and grove,
This majesty of earth and sky,
These lovely song-birds winging by.
In waving leaf and tinted flower
An art surpassing human power;
From field and wood a fragrance fine,
In every breeze a breath divine.

It passeth understanding here;
Perchance in some diviner sphere
Its deeper meanings, yet untold,
May merge in wonders manifold.
But now,—to dream a little space,
To say the silent, sweeter grace,
To sit where sun and shadow blend,
And greet the pageant, with a friend.

IN GRIEF

O spirit, sore burdened with sorrow,
And shrinking in dread from the days,
The Soul of the universe listeth,
She comforteth wonderful ways.

Fare forth to her solace at morning,
The sunlight is bidden to heal,
The day shall enfold thee with beauty,
The night, brooding splendors reveal.

O heart, earth and heaven are tendered,
Not suing thy homage or praise,
The Soul of the universe loveth,
She comforteth wonderful ways.

MY HEAVEN

O'er this entrancing blue of sky,
Soft clouds of gray come sweeping by;
A sudden shifting of the scene,
And bands of blue show gold between;
Now bars of flame their glory shed,
And all my heaven is flecked with red.

O, joy! what splendors here unroll!
What gleams that reach from sense to soul!
But since full soon they fade away,
If some new heaven shall dawn one day,
All saintly pure, from sense refined,
Pray God I be not color-blind!

THE WARTBURG

To F. B.

Do you remember, dear, the day
We took our somewhat sober way
To the Wartburg?

Do you recall the crooked path
That veered away, (arousing wrath)
From the Wartburg?

Do you yet see that sheer ascent,
A wall to scale for all who went
To the Wartburg?

Do you yet feel the full surprise
That met our waiting, eager eyes
On the Wartburg?

That vast immensity of view
That seemed to reach the half earth through
From the Wartburg?

But more, the memories crowding there
Of him who breathed that freer air
Of the Wartburg?

Of him who waked the world one day,
And so enshrined this Castle gray
On the Wartburg!

THE ONLY WAY

God guard the little children
  In dens of vice and sin,
Where, innocent and guileless,
  The evil deeds begin.

God bless the little children
  To want and hunger born,
In life's beginnings hindered,
  In babyhood forlorn.

God save the little children
  Where mammon's curses be,
Where pride but merits pity
  And wealth is poverty.

In haunts of want and evil,
  In homes of luxury,
God help the little children,
  O heedless folk, through thee.

CHILDREN IN DARKNESS!

NEWS ITEM: "Thousands of children are working from morning till night and from year to year in the depths of earth where the sun never shines."

How the sun in its rapture of giving,
  Pours lavishly ray upon ray;
There is light for the world in its largess,
  Are there children in darkness to-day?

How the sunbeams dance over the earth-floor
  In frolic, to lure us to play,
They are wooing young life to its birthright—
  Are there children in darkness to-day?

I ask you, free master of toilers
  In dungeons of earth hid away,
Turn your soul to the sunlight and answer,—
  Are there children in darkness to-day?

IN THE STREET

The dazzling sunlight dances in the street,
Along the street the lights and shadows play,
And little children come to greet the day
And join the festal dance with nimble feet.
When lo! around the curve comes, demon fleet,
A car! and since no mortal life indeed,
Can cope with cruel power, mad for speed,
A little child lies dead upon the street.

O Man! Is traffic's mood but to destroy?
Is commerce of such price that you should pay
No heed to little children at their play,
Defiant of life's dearest earthly joy?
If speed indeed must be so senseless wild,
Yourself, yourself destroy, but save the child.

ON SEEING THE ELGIN MARBLES

Ay, forward do the ages fare alway,
Yet who, enchanted by this festal scene,
This pageant to Athene, Wisdom's queen,
Affirms not something lost in this new day?
A love of beauty which forbids display,
In nature's myriad forms a pure delight,
The seeing eye, the harmony of sight,—
This power transfigured, has it passed away?

O wise new age! in nature's laws secure,
The finer knowledge of her life confess,
That could remake, not mar her image pure,
And wake the stones one day to loveliness.
Lest newer arts of thine God's art destroy,
Go learn what beauty is, and life, and joy.

CONCORD

To H. F. E.

Dear friend, and lover of the seers, I send
This little sonnet from a hallowed spot,
A shrine, in sooth, that will not be forgot
Till reverence for genius has an end.
These shaded streets, these wooded roads that wend
To quiet country scenes, have known the tread
Of that calm sage, new Plato be it said,
In whom serenest faith and knowledge blend.

Here wandered Alcott too, almost a seer,
With his child-charmer, gifted in her art.
Shy Hawthorne, searcher of the soul, was here,
And Thoreau, knowing Nature's inmost heart.
Where these have dreamed, and walked their daily round,
While love of greatness lives, is holy ground.

Concord, Mass., August, 1896.

COMPENSATION

When some fast gathering storm assails the day
And summons darkness to obscure the sky,
And does with her wild turbulence essay
To shut out light and space from human eye,—
Comes swift from some mysterious source on high
A lightning flash to cleave the darkness through,
And lo, what depths of heaven we descry!
What vast, sun-lighted spaces come to view!

So in some gathering storm of grief and rue
A flash of hope irradiates the soul,
The heavy clouds of time are riven through,
The spaces of Eternity unroll!
O Life, how loving thy decrees that bring
The clearest, widest sight through suffering.

LAKE MICHIGAN AFTER THE STORM

Ah, who in looking on this sunlit lake,
So clear, so placid, so serenely blue,
Could guess that yestermorn its waters brake
Athwart these bars in blackest surge, and threw
Tumultuously toward heaven huge waves, that grew
In stormy power, and passion to control,—
Impelled opposing forces to subdue,
And mad for freedom,—like a human soul.

A human soul, that finite-fettered here,
Yet Godlike in an infinite longing given,
Enraged at limits set in this world-sphere,
Would earth destroy to gain the heights of heaven.
Somewhiles the self, too, doth its tumult cease,
And like these quiet waters, findeth peace.

HE THAT OVERCOMETH

Strive on, dear heart, though darkness wrap thee
round,
Though faith itself be false, and hopes decay,
Though even love would seem to fade away,
As sacred joys are lost that once were found.
Strive on, and weave thy feeling into thought,
Let thought grow into action every hour,
Let grief and trial be an added power
To bind thee to a purpose firmly wrought.

All fine achievement here is dearly bought,
And many in the struggle faint and fall;
But one of olden time has greatly taught
That they who overcome inherit all.
The crown for one who conquers, yet endures.
Strive on, dear heart, the victory shall be yours.

A CATBIRD

Concealed in this leafy bush close by,
A catbird uttered a piercing cry,
Then swift to a shady tree-top flew
And sang ecstatic a glad hour through.

A mournful wail, then a wave of song
That rolled and rippled the whole day long,
That gladdened the inmost life of June,
And held a turbulent heart in tune.

Thou, sage of the air, dost not devote
The long sweet day to a sad, wierd note,
But turnest this teasing note's annoy
To a lovely, lingering song of joy.

MARCH ON!

Suffrage Parade, 1913

Hail comrades, who, heroic-souled,
The scroll of human rights unrolled,
And dared, 'mid brutish scorn, one day
To tread the nation's free highway!
March on, your legions grow apace,
Among you myriads take their place,
An army, peaceful, fervent, brave,
Enlisted not to slay, but save.

March on, till all the land shall aid
Your trusty, valiant cavalcade,
Your troop above tradition's sway,
Enrolled to rescue, not to slay.
March on, till victory for your cause
Brings purer life and worthier laws,
Brings power your host shall help create
To shield the home and save the State!

TO E. E. G.

If fate or fortune stern denies
  The largess you would give,
Take solace you, who long have shown
  The brave, wise life to live.

You walk your way in kindliness,
  You work for others' weal,
And thus—to heal the heart of earth,
    The Heart of Heaven reveal.

WHITE BUTTERFLIES

To B. I. W.

The while she played *White Butterflies*
My soul went winging too,
Afloat between the earth and skies,
I swam wide spaces through.

I flitted light among the flowers,
I drifted on the air,
I floated, heedless of the hours,
In beauty everywhere.

O art, that in her touch o'erwhelms,
What witchery can be,
To lend release from lower realms,
And set the spirit free!

TO MY MOTHER AND SISTER

Since now mysterious space between us rolls,
And time its bells of distance sternly tolls,
It comforts me that we, apart, may share
The pageantry of nature everywhere.

This sun, that paints its promise after rain,
That pours its light and warmth through window pane,
Gives you, with me, the rapture of its rays,
Brings there as here the loveliness of days.

The magic moon, the glory of the stars,
With memories that time nor distance mars,
These marvels of that loved, enchanted past
Are ours to share while life itself shall last.

WHEN I AM GONE

What will my record be when I am gone
From this earth-home that seemed forever mine?
Gone from the sunlight and the friendly stars,
From trees, and wooded trails, and birds, and flowers,
Finished with this live world of human loves?
Let it at least be said that I loved life,
That those who gave me life I greatly loved,
That little children brought me daily cheer
And friendship best revealed the Heart of Heaven.
A fellowship with earth and sky I knew,
With stone and star, akin in mystery,
All moving with me toward a hidden goal.
They carry beauty in their course, and I,
What benison from me when I am gone?
Can suffering and love for human kind
Through constant years redeem the unwrought deed?
The spirit willing, and the mind alive
To hasten welfare for a hindered world?
Let it be said I prayed for this world's peace,
Its beauty, freedom, faith—when I am gone.

THE SONG SPARROW

When the song sparrow sings
There's a furling of wings
And a lift of the eyes
To the far-lighted skies.

As the sweet measures roll
There's a lift of my soul,
For my spirit takes wings
When the song sparrow sings.

A WREN

On a quiet, dreamy day,
Whiles I whiled an hour away,
Neath a window of my den
Came a wren.

Came with most insistent song,
Singing, trilling loud and long—
Early dawn to day's good den—
Saucy wren,

Asking in determined strain
Board and room in our domain,
Maybe houses, one to ten—
Like a wren!

No more quiet, no more rest,
Nails and hammer now the quest,
We must do the work of men
For a wren.

Plenteous water every day,
Care to scat-ter cats away—
Yet his enemies to ken,
Trust the wren.

He can drive the dreaded jay,
Chase the champion crow away,
Follow him through wood and fen,
Wrathful wren.

Aye, the mightiest wingéd foe
He can overcome, I trow—
Yet how can I, with a pen,
Sketch a wren?

Now, if transmigration's true,
And wild ambition seizes you,
When you come to earth again,
Be a wren.

A PARADOX

To F. B. K.

Far, far through space we looked with awe,
And lo, what myriad suns we saw
In depths of night;
Day came, and every glowing star
That gleamed through mystic distance far
Was lost in light!

The dawn of day, the lapse of night,
And countless orbs concealed from sight,—
How can it be?
A paradox shall we surmise?
By day the sunlight blinds our eyes,
At night we see.

YOU

Birthday Greeting to F. B.

Meadow-sweet tokens and tall meadow-rue,
Loose strife, and vervain,—heavenly blue,—
Ladies' tresses and bunchberries too,
All for you.

For this midsummer day, as Mother Time flew,
She marked for somebody wise and true,
Somebody eager to serve life through,—
That was you.

July, 1921

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